DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 463 CE 073 394

TITLE	Knowledge of Nontraditional Careers Increases.
INSTITUTION	Montclair State Univ., Upper Montclair, NJ. Career Equity Assistance Center for Research and Evaluation.
SPONS AGENCY	New Jersey State Dept. of Education, Trenton. Office of Bilingual Education and Equity Issues.
PUB DATE	96
NOTE	6p.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	New Jersey Research Bulletin; n17 Spr 1996
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; Adult Programs; Comparative Analysis; *Displaced Homemakers; Improvement; *Knowledge Level; *Nontraditional Occupations; *One Parent Family; *Outcomes of Education; Pretests Posttests; Program Effectiveness; Sex Fairness; State Surveys; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	Carl D Perkins Voc and Appl Techn Educ Act 1990; Knowledge Development; *New Jersey

ABSTRACT

In 1996, the effectiveness of New Jersey's Perkins Act-funded single parent/displaced homemaker and gender equity programs in increasing clients' knowledge of nontraditional careers was evaluated through a 60-question survey that was administered to all clients before each program began and 6 weeks after completion of those portions of the programs pertaining to nontraditional careers. Matched pretest and posttest scores were obtained from 1,061 program participants (of whom 95.3% were female, 45.2% were Caucasian, 39.3 were Black, and 11.9% were Hispanic). The participants ranged in age from 14 to over 46 years old. Mean scores for all respondents were significantly higher on the posttest than on the pretest (35.6 versus 29.6). The mean pretest and posttest scores for all programs were 29.6 and 34.6 respectively. Both males and females demonstrated significant score increases on the posttest. Mean posttest scores were significantly higher for all age ranges analyzed except for the 14-15 age range. With the exception of individuals who classified themselves as Native American, all ethnic/racial groups demonstrated significantly higher scores on the posttest than on the pretest. The evaluation confirmed the results of the 1995 evaluation. In both years, the youngest program participants had the least knowledge of nontraditional careers. (MN)

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KNOWLEDGE OF NONTRADTIONAL CAREERS INCREASES
RESEARCH BULLETIN NO. 17

CAREER EQUITY ASSISTANCE CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND EVALUATION
MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

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RESEARCH BULLETIN

NEW JERSEY
CAREER EQUITY ASSISTANCE CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Spring, 1996 LIFE SKILLS CENTER, MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY Research Bulletin No. 17

Knowledge of Nontraditional Careers Increases

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During Program Year 1996, single parent/ displaced homemaker and sex equity programs funded through the Carl D. Perkins Act in New Jersey conducted a series of evaluations designed to assess the effect of program participation on participants. The results of these evaluations were analyzed independently by the Career Equity Assistance Center for Research and Evaluation at Montclair State University (CEAC). This bulletin represents one in a series of four reports on test results obtained during Program Year 1996. Other bulletins present results of testing for self esteem, equity standards and sex role attitudes.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS INCREASE KNOWLEDGE OF NONTRADITIONAL CAREERS

Projects for single parents/displaced homemakers that are funded under the federal Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act, P.L. 101-392, are required to provide marketable skills training in areas which produce economic self-sufficiency. Lack of knowledge about careers limits entry into occupations which could be both personally and financially rewarding to females.

This study evaluated the changes in knowledge concerning nontraditional careers of participants in projects funded by the Perkins sex equity set aside funds. These projects in New Jersey are administered by the Office of Bilingual Education and Equity Issues of the New Jersey Department of Education.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A career is defined as nontraditional for a gender if it is dominated by 75 percent or more of the other gender. According to *Women and Nontraditional Work* (1993), only about 7 percent of all working women were employed in nontraditional occupations in 1992. The Institute for Women's Leadership (1993) reported that in 1990, 68% of New Jersey women worked in gender-segregated clerical, service and sales jobs, earning less, with fewer benefits, status and security than if employed in "men's" jobs.

In New Jersey, women continue to be concentrated in low wage jobs. Women account for 67.2% of all low wage workers. Of the females in the work force, 54.5% held low wage jobs compared to 29% low wage earners in the male work

force (Life Skills Center, 1992). Women working in nontraditional jobs typically earn 20 - 30 percent more than women in traditional occupations, but earn less than men in the same occupation (*Women and Nontraditional Work*, 1993).

Bayne and Gerber (1990) identified the following barriers to nontraditional occupations: the influence of family/friends, low occupational self-concept, lack of money for educational preparation, role conflict, fear of success or failure and lack of role models or information.

In a previous study, Bernstein, Reilly and Coté-Bonanno (1992) found that knowledge about nontraditional careers was significantly related to age, type of school, parental status, marital status, race, mother's occupation and father's occupation. Students in the 20 year age category had a lower level of knowledge concerning nontraditional careers than any other age group.

A strong relationship was found between knowledge about nontraditional careers and attitudes toward these careers (Bernstein, Reilly and Coté-Bonanno, 1992). Students who were most knowledgeable were also most likely to have positive attitudes concerning the suitability of nontraditional careers for either gender.

Previous evaluations of displaced homemaker and sex equity programs in New Jersey funded through the Perkins Act have shown that participants increased their knowledge of nontraditional careers significantly as a result of program participation (Bernstein, Coté-Bonanno, Reilly, Carver and Doremus, 1995). The increase in knowledge concerning technical careers was significant for both males and females, for participants who classified themselves as Black, Hispanic or Other and for six of the ten age ranges analyzed.

METHOD OF STUDY

Data was collected from participants enrolled in single parent/displaced homemaker and sex equity programs throughout New Jersey during the 1996 program year. The Technical Careers Survey was developed specifically for use in these programs in New Jersey. The survey consists of a set of 3 questions pertaining to training, wages and gender suitability for each of 20 occupations. All 60 questions were scored together to produce a single score. Matched pre and post tests were collected from 1061 program participants.

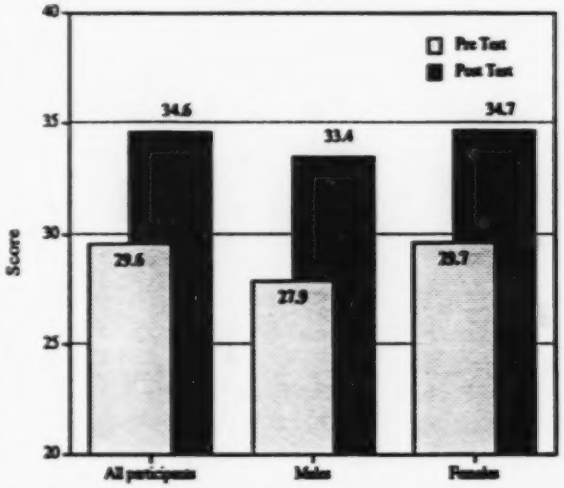
Program personnel administered both pre and post tests. Pre tests were administered prior to the beginning of any program. Post tests were administered 6 weeks after the completion of that part of the program pertaining to nontraditional careers. Tests were scored by program personnel. Total scores were forwarded for analysis to the Career Equity Assistance Center for Research and Evaluation at Montclair State University.

FINDINGS

The majority of the sample (95.3%) were females. Clients ranged in age from 14 years to over 46 years of age. The largest percentage of the respondents, 74.0 percent, were between 20 and 40 years of age. The largest portion of the respondents, 45.2 percent, classified themselves as Caucasian. The second and third largest groups classified themselves as Black, 39.3 percent, and as Hispanic, 11.9 percent.

Mean scores for all respondents were significantly higher for the post test (M34.6) than for the pre test (M29.6). The mean pre test score for all programs was 49.3 percent correct. The mean post test score for all schools was equal to 57.7 percent correct on the Technical Careers Survey.

Figure 1. Pre and post test scores on the Technical Careers Survey for all participants and by gender Program Year 1996



Mean post test scores were significantly higher than mean pre test

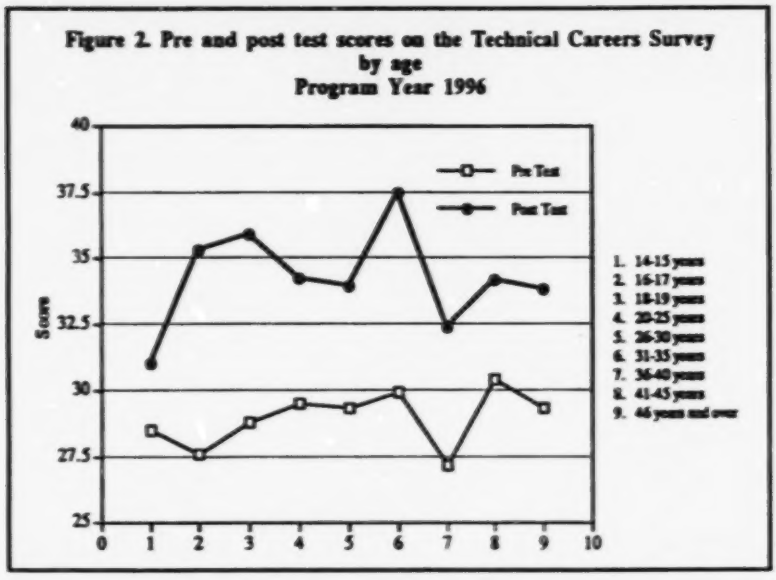


Figure 2. Pre and post test scores on the Technical Careers Survey by age Program Year 1996

scores for both males and females. Mean pre test scores for males (M27.9) and for females (M29.7) were similar. However, the mean post test score for females (M34.7) was slightly higher than the mean post test score for males (M33.4) reflecting a greater change in knowledge for the females. The average mean post test score for females reflected 58.3 percent correct compared to 55.0 percent correct for males (see Figure 1).

Mean pre test and post test scores were analyzed for two year ranges from 12 years to 19 years of age and for 5 year ranges from 20 to 45 years of age. The mean post test scores were significantly higher than mean pre test scores for all age ranges analyzed except for the participants who were 14 - 15 years of age.

The participants in the 31 - 35 year age range had the highest mean post test score (M37.5). The participants in the 14 - 15 year age range had the lowest mean post test score (M31.0); those in the 36 - 40 year age range also had a low mean post test score (M32.4). Mean post test scores for other age groups were between 34 and 36 (see Figure 2).

Mean post test scores were significantly higher for respondents who classified themselves as Asian, Black, Caucasian, Hispanic and Other. Asian respondents had the highest mean post test score (M38.3) followed by the Caucasian respondents (M35.2). The respondents who classified themselves as Asian had the largest difference between the mean pre test (M30.2) and the mean post test (M38.3). Respondents who classified themselves as Hispanic had the next largest difference (see Figure 3).

DISCUSSION

Participants in the single parent/displaced homemaker and sex equity programs in New Jersey funded through the Perkins sex equity set aside significantly increased knowledge of nontraditional careers as a results of program participation. Increases in knowledge were significant for both genders, for participants in all categories based on parental and marital status, for all ethnic/racial groups except for Native Americans and for all age groups over 15 years of age. These findings confirm the result of the evaluation for program year 1995, which also found significant increases in par-

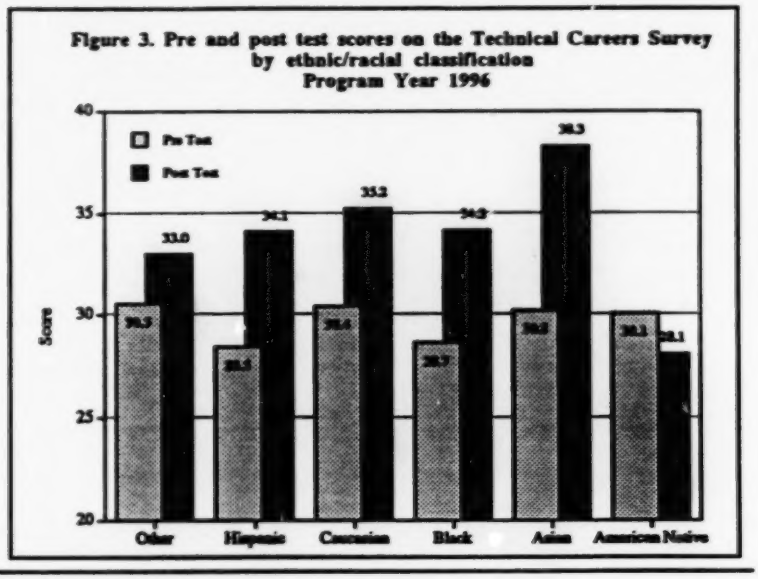


Figure 3. Pre and post test scores on the Technical Careers Survey by ethnic/racial classification Program Year 1996

ticipants across a wide range of demographic variables (Bernstein, et al., 1995).

The mean pre test score for program year 1996, 49.3 percent, was higher than the pre test score reported for program year 1995, but still indicated a low level of knowledge prior to enrollment. In both program year 1995 and 1996, participants in the youngest age ranges had the lowest levels of knowledge prior to program participation. Expanded efforts at this level are necessary to help inform young women before they make initial career choices.

The need for program content that includes information on nontraditional careers for women has been previously stressed by Bayne and Gerber (1990). The relationship between knowledge about nontraditional careers and attitude toward them has been demonstrated (Bernstein, Reilly and Coté-Bonanno, 1992). Students who were most knowledgeable were also most likely to have positive attitudes concerning the suitability of nontraditional careers for either gender.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In New Jersey, the programs funded through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act, P.L. 101-392, sex equity set aside provide a wide range of services to their participants. For a second consecutive program year, these programs have increased the knowledge of the participants concerning nontraditional careers.

Services offered by the single parent/displaced homemaker and sex equity program which address knowledge of nontraditional careers include:

- Saturday workshops that explore nontraditional careers;
- nontraditional role model panels;
- ASETS (Achieving Sex Equity Through Students), student leadership workshops;
- seminars and workshops on exploring career options; and
- New Beginnings Survival Skills curriculum.

While women in this country continue to comprise such a small percentage of nontraditional workers and while women in New Jersey continue to be clustered in low wage occupations, the need for programs such as those funded through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act, P.L. 101-392, continues. New Jersey's single parent/displaced homemaker and sex equity programs have demonstrated that they increase the knowledge of nontraditional careers across the range of their participants. Continuation and expansion of these programs is of vital importance in the campaign to ensure economic self-sufficiency for women.

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